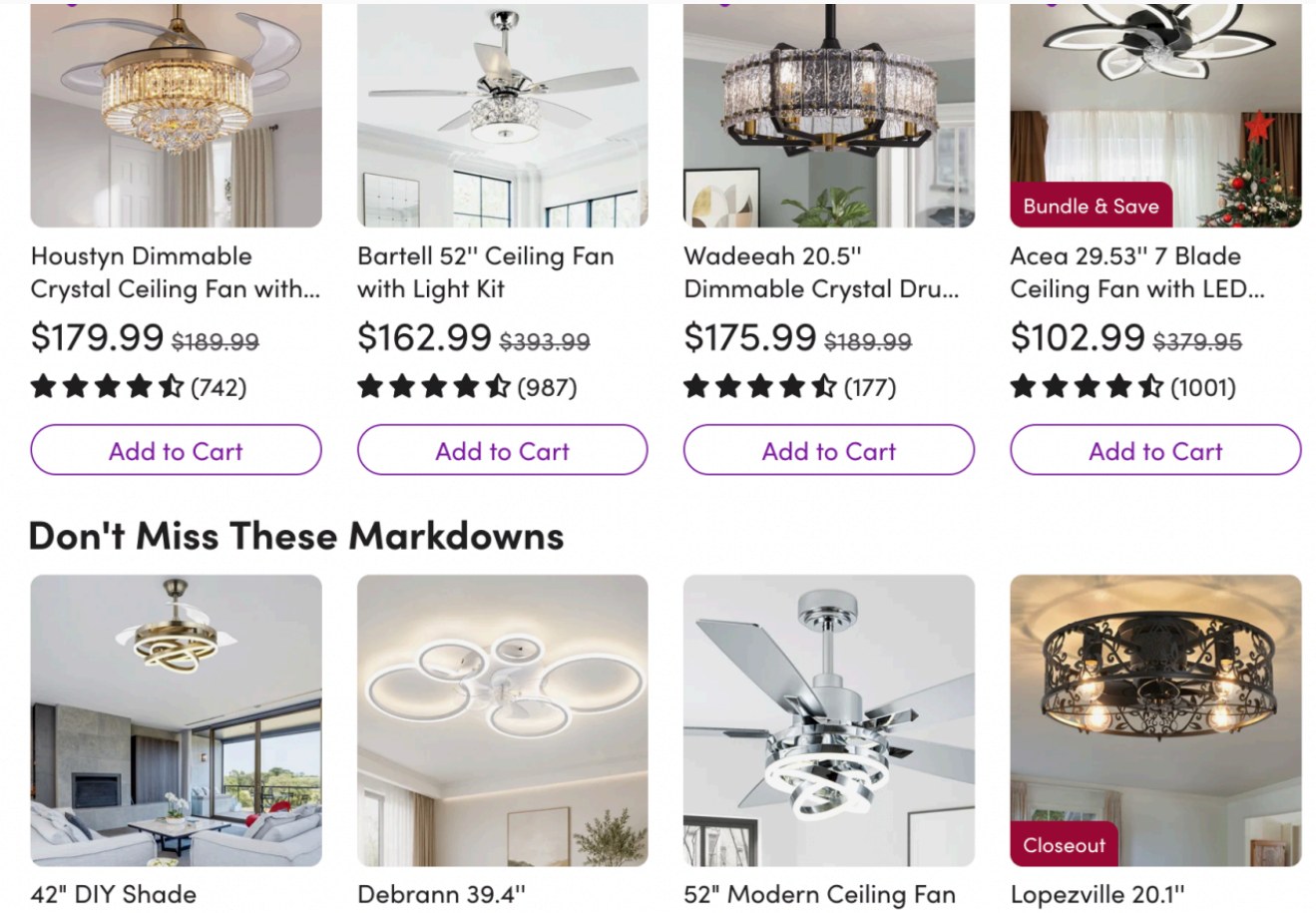
what is going on with ceiling fans

Sep 29, 2026 4,896 notes

Sometimes new design phenomena slip past even those of us who are most in tune with the happenings of the built environment. Such is the case with whatever the hell is going on with commercial ceiling fan design. Being a member of the renting class, a ceiling fan is something that is beyond my scope of purchase. All that aside, when I found myself trying to find inspiration for how to update the one in my apartment (which has very hideous lighting elements) what I saw genuinely shook me to my core.

BEHOLD:



“Fandeliers!” “LED Sculptural Lighting Modern Fan!” Big Ass Fans rip-offs prone to decapitating the poor denizens of your living room!“ See them: ceiling mounted light with fan (sure!) Ceiling mounted fan with LED element (sure!). Blades made of plastic, shades made of plastic, bodies made out of metal, wrought iron, and plastic made to look like metal and wrought iron! You name it, it’s there! Chaos, it seems, reigns in fanville.

Of course, like anyone these days, before beginning my analysis of the "fan situation” I had to do my due diligence and ascertain whether these fans are, in fact, AI fans. Confusing and perhaps deceptive depictions of scale tend to point one in that direction. However, while the rooms are certainly AI generated, product reviews (yes, these have been purchased!) tell me that the fans are not! To my astonishment, in the years since the pandemic (who knows how many – as I said, I am late to the phenomenon and most of the products listed are new as of last year) the ceiling fan as a genre of architectural detail has been completely torn asunder and remade.

Wayfair or Amazon that took place more than a decade ago has led to an unfathomable proliferation of products, each of which becomes its own algorithmic nugget against which other products are measured and in whose image they are later modified based on those results. Hence why there are so many fans that appear to be cousins of one another.

While outfits like IKEA revolutionized furniture mass production through creating simple and interchangeable parts thus lowering prices at the production level, Wayfair et al have done the opposite by eliminating the labor of the storefront and instead rely entirely on cheap production overseas and the preexisting logistics networks that effortlessly bring fan atrocities directly to our doors. (One of the middlemen this approach eschews is the marketing guy that tells you, hey, that's an ugly fan.)

Meanwhile, LED light fixtures – which most of these are – allow for new degrees of design flexibility, much of which are "sculptural" in nature. Without the "problem" of the light bulb to solve, light could be diffused in all matter of tubes, shafts, and curlicues. As with any new development, there are tasteful ways of using it, and there are…not tasteful ways of using it. These fixtures are also revolutionary in that they are extremely cheap in the short run – many of these fans cost under $200 – but expensive in the long rung, as the LEDs usually cannot be replaced, causing the whole apparatus to be thrown away.

These humble materialist paeans however do not explain the sheer insanity (one could say the infanity) of the situation at hand. Hybridizations abound. For example, one can say that there is such thing as a "fandelier" – a chandelier with a fan in it, and its dialectical opponent: a fan with a chandelier attached to it. (Perhaps a chandefan?)



Here we see an archetypal fandelier (Rosdorf Park Presnell Dimmable Crystal Ceiling Fan with LED Lights and Remote Control™ - $169 on Wayfair.) In this example, the blades – a cheap plastic – are retractable, and come up above the chandelier. This is not standard, however. Often the opposite is true – they are embedded in the base of the fixture itself. Meanwhile, a chandefan:

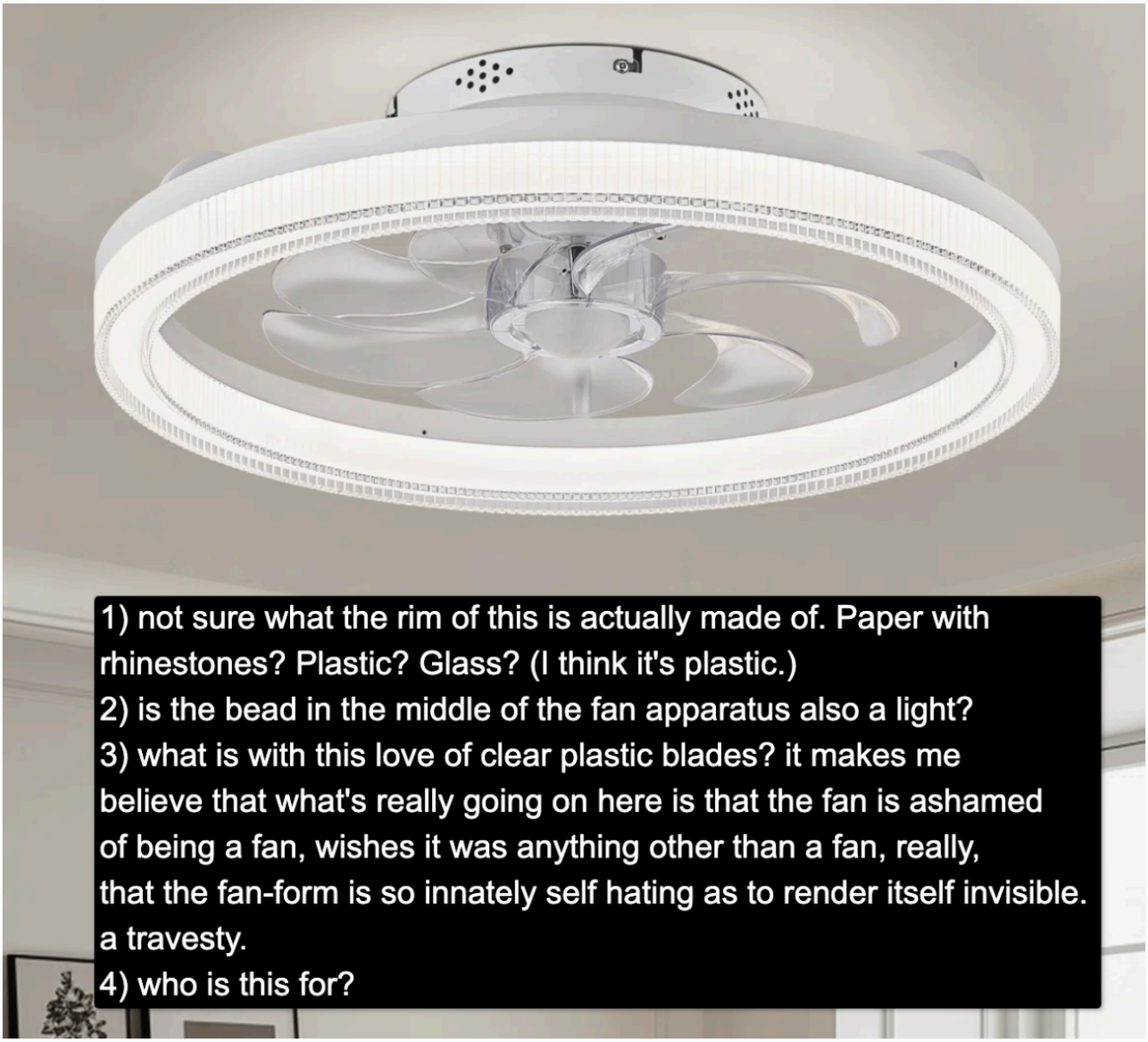


A cousin of the fandelier – and the most common form of Neo-Fan – is the flush mounted ceiling fan. Imagine if your landlord special circular downlight had a fan in it! Wouldn't that be so awesome!



As you can tell, the fan in this light is pathetically small – basically only about a foot in diameter. However, I suppose a tiny fan fitted 10 feet above the sweltering user is better than nothing? Who doesn't love an imitation of a stale and inadequate breeze on a day that is desperate for relief from the sun? Maybe your landlord might even let you have one, if he's nice?

This brings us to another of the "flush fans" – the "border" fan, i.e. a normal fan that for some reason has a border around it. This is pushing the previous categories to their limits. What is fan and what is light become ever less entangled and yet remain inseparable…



By the way, there is a subset of this fan that can only be described as:



Honestly of all the fans here, this is the one I see getting the most play. I want to make so many jokes about being on the computer here, however I will move on. You can make them yourself.

Alright, now we are getting into Weird territory. First up: Weird Blades. This is self explanatory.



Physics limits how weird one can get with the blade thing. A strange unforeseen circumstance of this is that in order to get the big, dramatic, sculptural look of an unorthodox blade, designers have resigned themselves to doing something that is borderline diabolical which is to simply put one of those tiny plastic fans under what looks like a much bigger and more impressive fan that *does not move* because it is not a fan:

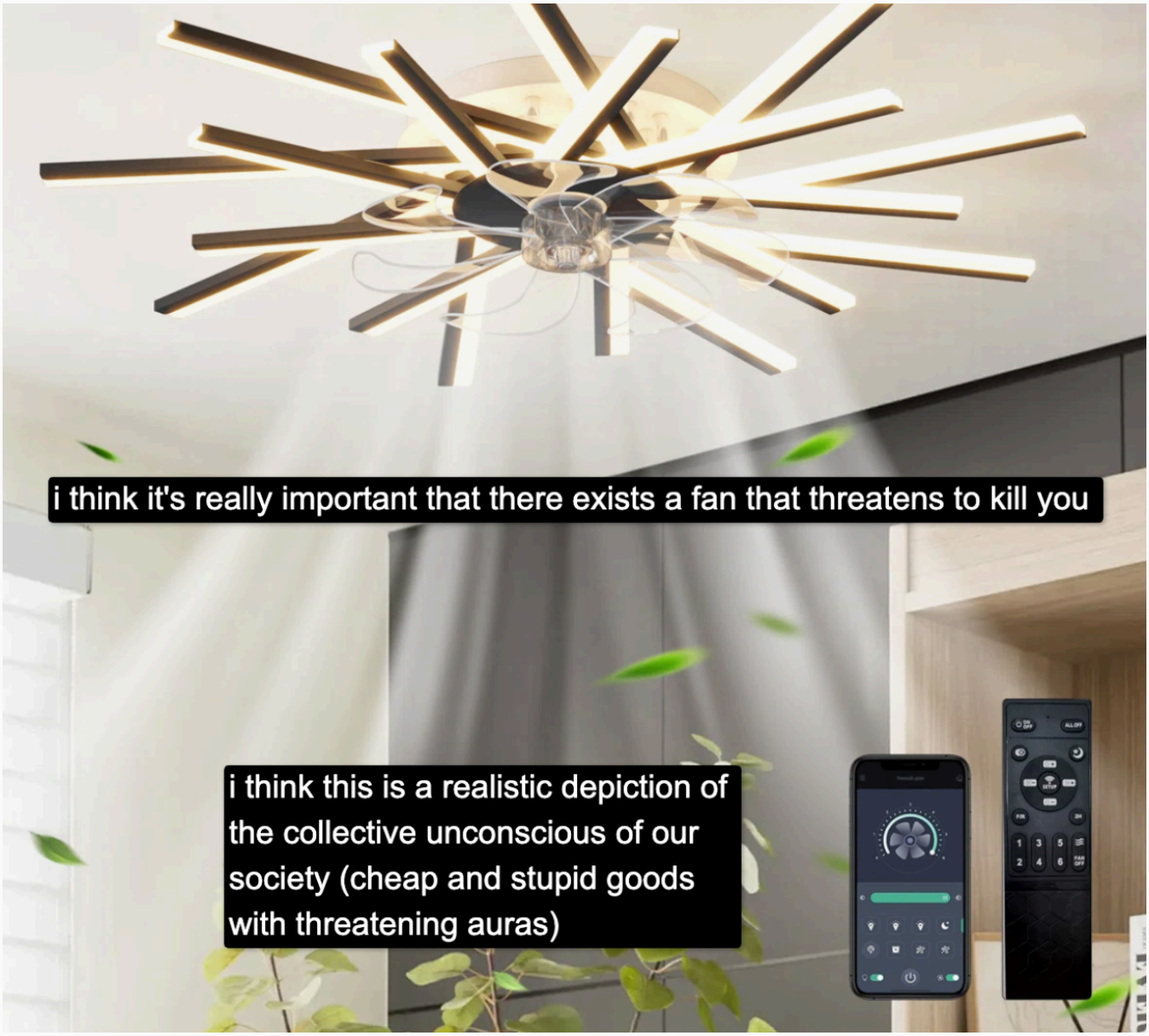




As you can see, some of these fans are not fanlike at all. Perhaps soon, the word ‘fan’ will enter a period of semantic shift in which it only begins to mean 'person who is really normal online about Taylor Swift.’ If a gaggle of five circles can be a fan, when does it end?

The liberating (I guess) thing about all this is that the fan itself has become an appendage, an unfinished thought. Because it is transparent, it can be applied wherever and to whatever one wants. It refuses the concept of integration - a key element of design thinking - in lieu of concealment, and even then, it is not very successful. Perhaps juxtaposition is the right word? The fan and the thing-that-becomes-a-fan. Where will it end?

I wound up looking at over one hundred ceiling fans for this small blog post, and I’m sure you’re all wondering which one is my favorite. I have to say it’s the “Hanke 36.22” 6-Speed Dimmable Reversible Ceiling Fan With Led Lights And Remote Control" ($167)



At any rate, of these new fans I don’t think I can say I am one!!!

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the process of moving house!)

P.S. - I am sorry for the long hiatus! I finally did something about my mental health, and now I am much better!

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